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CITY PLANNING AND PHILADELPHIA PARKS

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There is pessimism in America concerning cities and the government thereof. The effect of this is unfortunate; it tends to induce inaction rather than action. Had the forces spent in criticism been spent in constructive effort, the work and the joy of it would have been sufficient reward for the pessimists themselves and the results would have benefited their fellowmen whose condition they impotently deplore.

Good results, however, have not been wholly wanting. The problem of municipal government is known to be a problem. The attention of the public is directed to it. It is remarkable that until late years such attention was largely academic. No other form of government governs us so intimately. We cannot leave our homes without experiencing what the municipal government is doing for us. We cannot be at home without feeling what the municipal government is doing for us. Is the sewage system adequate? Are the streets well paved and well cleaned? Is the street lighting and is the house lighting good and at reasonable rates? Is the water we drink pure? Is the air we breathe wholesome? Are the houses that we occupy at the cheapest rents safely constructed? Can we get from our homes to our places of work by direct means of communication, at short intervals, in quick time and at cheap rates? Are our children well taught in safe and sanitary buildings? Have they safe places in which to play? Are facilities for our own outdoor enjoyment near enough for us to make use of them? Are the housing facilities of our poorest neighbors sufficiently sanitary to prevent their own death and the death of ourselves and our dear ones because of contagion produced by unhealthy living conditions? Does business work smoothly and easily because of adequate facilities in transportation by street, rail and river? These are questions the solution of which depends wholly or in a great part upon the governments of our cities. The state and federal governments affect us each day in a far less intimate way.

In the city, as elsewhere, one function interacts with another and upon another. We may have adequate rules as to house building, and yet if the transportation is dear or if the train service is inadequate or if the distance to be traveled is great, housing conditions are apt to be bad. Direct and quick transportation between a man's work and his home is an important element in determining just what kind of a home he will find when he reaches it. Street railway systems are not the only means of city transportation. The streets themselves are equally means of transportation. If in going to his work a man must take the two sides of a right-angled triangle instead of the hypotenuse he will lose considerable time because of the increase in distance and possibly because of the necessary change of cars with the wait for the second car. A short space of time is lost on each trip per day, but if we multiply his daily loss by the number of working days in each year to find out what he has lost and multiply his loss by a number that equals the population of the city, we will have some idea of the loss in time and the resulting loss in energy and efficiency that is caused by the gridiron system of streets that our city governments have generally given us. If the streets are as badly planned as in New York, with the few north and south streets, which are much less numerous than the less needed east and west streets, the close packing of women against men on the overcrowded transit lines is apt to result in a general lowering of the moral life of the community.

The necessary relation between the street system and the organic life of the community is obvious, but how vitally it affects that life has not yet been determined. In America we have begun, and only just begun, to analyze it and measure it. In Germany the question has been studied more intently but its solution has not been reached. What is the relationship between the street system and the commercial life of the city? What is the relationship between the street system and the home life? What is the bearing of the street system upon all the other features of the life of city dwellers?

Ten years ago "the city plan" was generally understood to mean the plan of city streets. During this decade the study of the problem of the city government to which the pessimists directed us by their despair has been proceeding as it never proceeded before. All the forms of city life have been investigated. The Pittsburgh survey has been completed—or, I should say, the completion of the

Pittsburgh survey has begun the study of Pittsburgh. Clearer and clearer has become the recognition that the functions of the city whether governmental, commercial, industrial, educational, social, recreational or religious will depend to some extent, an extent not yet indicated, upon the physical city. The study of the physical city has been prosecuted. Nearly every city of importance has a duly appointed body that is studying the city plan, and that study has caused an enlargement of the meaning of the term. The city plan has come to mean practically the entire physical aspect of the city. It covers the system of streets, the system of transportation, the development of the water front, improvement in the appearance of public buildings, and, very tentatively, of private buildings; the opening of parks, playgrounds and recreation piers; the creation of sufficient means of communication by the transportation system and by the street system so that workmen may reach their homes, in the words of the Parliamentary Commission, "at short intervals, in quick time and at cheap rates." This is the meaning of "the city plan" as it is now understood.

Much has been accomplished in the past decade and reports that are inspiring have been issued. The plan of the street system of Washington has been studied with important results. The effect of a good plan on the future of the city as shown by Washington and Buffalo and of a bad plan as shown by Philadelphia has been noted. The Metropolitan Improvement Commission of Boston has just issued its report covering "the metropolitan plan" for adopting "a systematic method of internal communication by highways," as well as railroads and railroad terminals, water-front development, docks, waterways and civic centers. Adequate street system plans are being evolved throughout the country.

Dependent upon the plan of the streets is the system of transportation by surface or overhead railroads. Largely, but not absolutely, dependent upon that plan is the system of underground roads. Generally they will follow the line of the streets, though the London "Tuppenny Tube" shows that this is not necessary. Dependent upon the street system is the adequacy of the park system. Parks that are not accessible easily and cheaply are useless. Parks and playgrounds must be chosen with reference to the street system. Heretofore they have been chosen frequently without regard to the street system. Witness the example of Central

Park in New York City, placed so that it absolutely cuts off two of the ten or eleven main arteries running north and south. Pope Park in Hartford is a less conspicuous example.

In America the development of river fronts as they have been developed abroad will be, I venture to predict, the striking development of the next twenty years. It is bound to come as the result of the study of the physical city. It will be striking because the change from the slum-like condition of our river banks to that of the most highly-improved districts of the city cannot but arrest attention. But the city plan will have broader and deeper effects than this conspicuous one.

How are street systems to be devised to provide for the changes that have taken place heretofore and that will take place hereafter whereby what is at one time a residential district becomes the home of the poorest, and again the most sought for business area. In this process, how may the slum be avoided? A district may be inhabited first by the poor and then by the rich, or the reverse may be the process. Examples of both processes taking place now may be found within the old city of William Penn of two square miles. The expansion of the business center at the cost of the residential district is familiar. I am not attempting to determine which in general will precede and which will follow. But obviously a street system prepared solely with the idea that the area covered will forever be residential may have serious results when the handsome residence of one family becomes the lowly home of several families. The darkened smoke-house at the back of the residence may be a serious menace if it becomes the home of a family of twelve. What provisions should be made by the city government for such changes in the character of the occupancy of individual houses? What relationship does the street system have to that character?

However admirable the street system, the buildings that front on an individual street in one case may show excellent housing conditions and in another unpardonably bad housing conditions. However admirable the location of a street yet the paving and cleaning of it may be wretched. Perhaps the relationship of housing conditions to the street system is no more necessary; yet there is a relationship. What is the relationship? The Germans have begun to study it. We understand that there is one, and investigation has been begun. The National Conference on City Planning held last

spring in Washington directed the preparation of a special report thereon.

This problem of the city plan is more fundamental and significant than any one of its features. They all depend upon it. The possibilities of some features are little understood. The Chicago extension of the public service of playgrounds has broadened the scope of such service far beyond that of the familiar city parks or squares.

The system of parks and playgrounds is vital not only from the point of view of the City Beautiful, but equally from that of the City Healthful, and it should be made so from the point of view of the City Convenient. The death rate of well-parked and bountifully gardened Bourneville, the home of day-workers, is half that of the average of our cities.

Curiously enough the study of the park system and of playground development has been the means of leading on to the study of the city plan. Foremost among the plans for the physical development of the city were the park plans of metropolitan Boston and of Kansas City, both published in 1893. Five years earlier New York City grasped for it with a grasp that then proved and still remains ineffective, though a beginning was indeed accomplished in the Bronx system of parks. After the inception of the Boston system came other park movements such as the notable Essex County system and the Washington plan. These are but a few of the park plans that have been published since the Boston plan of 1893. Many of these plans are described in detail in accompanying articles. This idea of preserving parks in out-lying districts was denominated at first the Outer Park Movement. Accompanying it was the agitation for creating playgrounds and more numerous city squares in built-up sections. Second- and third-class cities and even villages have undertaken the work.

The movement has resulted in minute details as witnessed by the improvement of back yards and the erection of attractive sign posts; and in magnificent plans for cosmopolitan development such as the Chicago report published by the Commercial Club of that city within the year. In all the later reports the co-ordination between the street system and the park system has become more and more the dominant note.

In Philadelphia there has been the same development. In
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1884 the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association of London was formed. In 1888, through the familiarity of some of Philadelphia's leading women with the work of that association, The City Parks Association was formed, then called the Small Parks Association. In 1902 The City Parks Association published a pamphlet on the City Plan, which, I believe, was the first formal association report on that subject in America. In 1903 the association published the well-known report on American Park Systems. In 1907 its plan for a comprehensive park system for Philadelphia was published. In 1909 that plan was adopted formally by the city administration. Since the formation of the association thirty-six "city squares," averaging about four acres each, nineteen small triangular green spots, and eleven large parks covering, as acquired, about ten hundred and fifty acres, and, in addition, as placed upon the confirmed city plan, about fourteen hundred acres, have been preserved through appropriate action of councils. Parkways eight miles in length are in course of construction and an additional seven miles have been placed upon the confirmed city plan by similar action. The present acreage of the parks selected prior to 1888 is three thousand five hundred and eighty-one.

The Philadelphia park plan of 1909 does not attempt to forecast in detail the system of city streets, but it does attempt not to interfere in any way with that system or the principle of it. It adopts the principle of the radial system of streets, not the Penn plan of gridirons. As elsewhere, the natural topography of the city was studied and parks recommended accordingly. Running transversely from northwest to southeast are five water courses. One of these is the Wissahickon Creek continued by the Schuylkill River, already largely preserved for park purposes. The other four are the creek valleys paralleling the Wissahickon and called respectively the Poquessing, the Pennypack, Tacony and Cobb's Creek. They lie a distance of from three to four miles from each other. These creek valleys are deep and narrow and usually about two hundred yards from hill-crest to hill-crest. Their depth and sloping sides make them undesirable for building purposes and particularly adaptable and attractive for park purposes.

The grade of streets in general should be level because transportation is done most cheaply on level roads. Harriman's famous low-grade freight line in the West is but this principle applied to

railroads. If streets are then to be carried at a level across these valleys the city will be responsible for the cost caused by the change of grade, and these costs will amount to a greater sum than the cost of taking the valleys for park purposes. This argument has been an effective one in securing the adoption of the plan by the city government. In the last two or three years large portions of the three valleys of the Tacony, Cobb's and Pennypack creeks have been preserved.

The attention directed to the subject of park development has resulted in the concurrent creation of a number of new city squares, heretofore referred to, and in the creation of a playground commission whose report will probably be published before this volume of *THE ANNALS* is printed.

The park movement in Philadelphia has been signalized further by the preservation of places of historic interest. A notable instance during the past year was the acquisition by the city of the home-stead of James Logan, Secretary to William Penn, a building described by the late Charles F. McKim as the most perfect example of colonial architecture in America.

A superb feature of the movement here is the undertaking by the city of an improvement that has caused and is causing the greatest interest throughout the country. This is the Fairmount Park Parkway. This parkway is designed to connect the City Hall at the center of the city with Fairmount Park, which lies in a diagonal direction to the northwest about a mile away. The design is to create a great avenue fully the equal of the boasted boulevards of foreign cities. The project has been under consideration for many years and has had its victories and its defeats. It has, I trust, won a final and definite place upon the city plan. Its construction is being pushed with vigor by this administration, to which great credit for constructive work in the broader meaning of the term "city plan" is due.

The development of the water fronts on the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers is being planned. The necessity is seen. The opportunities are not realized, but the plan is engaging the thought of the city officials. It has even been undertaken in some of its details so far as commercial development is concerned; but it has not yet been undertaken on the lines of the London and Paris Embankments.

The necessity of the supervision of public buildings by an adequate body of architects and art-loving financiers of the city is understood, but the art jury, authorized by act of the legislature, has not yet been appointed. The supervision of the main façades of private dwellings such as exists in Paris is whispered. Is it sufficiently democratic ever to get a strong hold in America? I doubt it. I trust it is inadequate to gain any hold. The remedy for wretched architecture in private dwellings is education in taste, not control from above.

The park system of Philadelphia cannot be adequate unless action by adjoining counties is induced. An act of the legislature was passed within the year which makes such action possible. In Philadelphia as in every other city it is true that the community for which plans should be prepared is not the community within the particular boundary of the city concerned. The life of a community is the life of the people who live their active lives there. A man who lives in one of Philadelphia's suburbs is not legally a citizen of Philadelphia, but in the broad sense of the city plan he is just as much a citizen as the man who votes in the city.

Realizing this fundamental fact the City Parks Association has just published a report in which it urges the creation of a commission to study the development of the city. The appointment of such a commission is recommended in a letter of the mayor which is published with the report. The recommendation of the report, which is characteristic of similar reports elsewhere, is: "Let the work assigned to this commission be to prepare a plan for the systematic development of the region within twenty-five miles of the City Hall, or farther if the commission approves. Let the report cover transportation, the street system, the river front, parks, playgrounds, civic centers, so that there shall result (1) the preservation of the system of two-story houses; (2) the creation of a greater commercial city; and (3) the beautification of the entire community."

In conjunction with all this it is well to weigh the words of one of the consistent and effective city plan workers of the country, Frederick Law Olmsted. In a letter to me concerning the project just noted he says:

I hope that in discussing and advocating it you will emphasize much more than you do in this report the fundamental principle, hinted at in the
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last sentence quoted from Mayor Reyburn . . . in the phrase "of elasticity to meet the varying conditions which may confront successive administrations." The general attitude in America about city plans, too much in evidence in nearly all the recent developments in that line, is that a city plan can be prepared in a year or two or three which can be regarded as providing a tolerably complete solution of the problems of city planning for a long period to come, which can be definitely adopted and placed on file, and which thenceforth only needs to be systematically and somewhat mechanically followed in order to produce the sought-for results. It is apt to be looked upon as a sort of "handout" from a superior order of enlightened citizens and their "experts" possessed of "constructive imagination," etc., to the mechanical minded persons concerned in doing the daily drudgery of municipal administration; to serve as a guide and charter which will thereafter keep the latter to the proper lines of activity. This attitude is closely akin to that which makes it so much easier to arouse almost any American to an interest in putting forth work and money for a new piece of construction than for the proper maintenance of existing things.

Here is a thought well worth while. Cities must be developed on some consistent plan. A plan that is of the rigidity of our cast-iron gridiron system is quite inadequate, but for that gridiron system we must be careful not to substitute some other cast-iron system.

The necessity for such care has been brought home to us by the possibilities of Chicago's playgrounds referred to in another article. The advocates of city parks have had at times an exceedingly difficult fight to make against their use for various public buildings. In Philadelphia, attempts were made to put public libraries upon them, and great monuments were proposed for them; in New York City, public schools were almost ordered upon them by the legislature. So vigilant was it necessary to be that the principle "no building of any kind upon the open space created by a park" has become rooted in the mind of the park advocate. When we see such admirable buildings as are erected upon the Chicago playgrounds whereby open spaces created for parks are made available in winter and summer, whereby thousands and tens of thousands are attracted to the open air of the public playgrounds, we are forced to realize that the principle of no buildings upon our public squares is too rigid. Any building that is really germane to the use of the square as an *open* public space for the health and enjoyment of the citizens must be admitted.

In regard to plans of development only broad principles should be sketched. Details can be arranged later. "The varying condi-

tions of successive administrations" demand an elasticity of which some of the plans that have seen their birth within the last ten years do not admit. We must have plans of development and they must be sufficiently rigid and sufficiently wise to secure their adoption by the different minds of successive administrators,—but they must be capable of reasonable variation; and the park system as a component part of the organic system of the ever-growing city must be capable of change.